

BEFORE THE  
POSTAL REGULATORY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20268-0001

ANNUAL COMPLIANCE REVIEW, 2020

Docket No. ACR2020

ANSWER OF THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE IN OPPOSITION TO STEVE  
HUTKINS' MOTION FOR ISSUANCE OF INFORMATION REQUEST

(January 26, 2021)

Pursuant to 39 CFR § 3001.21(b), the United States Postal Service hereby files this Answer in Opposition to the Motion for Issuance of Information Request filed by Steve Hutkins on January 19, 2021 ("January 19, 2021 motion").

Mr. Hutkins' new motion seeks detailed information concerning Post Office suspensions and discontinuances, contract retail units (CPOs, CPUs, and VPOs), the Collection Point Management System (CPMS), collection boxes, Post Office hours of operation, employee availability, COVID-19 impacts, and service performance.<sup>1</sup>

The Postal Regulatory Commission has already mooted certain of Mr. Hutkins' requests. For instance, the Postal Service's quarterly reports on suspended Post Offices, its FY2020 Annual Compliance Report, and its answers to the Commission's third Chairman's Information Request provide much of the information that Mr. Hutkins seeks with regard to suspended post offices.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in its answer to the first

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Hutkins filed similar motions seeking information on some (but not all) of these matters in the ACR2015 docket, see PRC Docket No. ACR2015, Steve Hutkins Motion for Issuance of Information Request, January 20, 2016, and in the ACR2019 docket, see PRC Docket No. ACR2019, Steve Hutkins Motion for Issuance of Information Request, January 15, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> See PRC Docket No. ACR2019, Notice of the United States Postal Service Regarding Filing of Post Office Suspension Information Update For FY20 Quarter 4, November 9, 2020; PRC Docket No. ACR2020, United States Postal Service FY2020 Annual Compliance Report, December 29, 2020; PRC Docket No. ACR2020, Responses of the United States Postal Service to Questions 1-26 Of Chairman's Information Request No. 3., January 22, 2021. The information provided by these sources includes: the

Chairman's Information Request, the Postal Service provided updated figures on contract retail units.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, in its response to the Commission's second Chairman's Information Request, the Postal Service explained how fluctuating employee availability, brought on by COVID-19, has impacted its ability to set and meet service performance targets.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the FY2020 Annual Compliance Report, as well as the Postal Service's response to the third Chairman's Information Request, provide detailed information concerning Service Performance.<sup>5</sup> Any remaining information the Commission did not itself see fit to request; accordingly, such information seems unlikely to aid the Commission in its work. The effort required to obtain it does, however, appear likely to divert much-needed resources from the Postal Service. For example, Mr. Hutkins' Proposed Information Request No. 1 seeks information not contained in the Postal Service's already extensive documentation of the Post Offices that remain suspended as of the end of FY 2016, including, for each Post Office, the "suspension reason," the "discontinuance proposal posting date," "date of community meeting," and "date of posting final determination to discontinue."<sup>6</sup> Researching hundreds of suspension files to gather this information would place a severe administrative burden on the responsible personnel.

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state, area, district office name, and facility type of each remaining suspended Post Office; the Postal Service's prospects for resolving the remaining suspensions in FY2021; and under what circumstances, and regarding which currently suspended Post Offices, the Postal Service will have to re-post, repeat other steps outlined in Handbook PO-101, and conduct new community meetings.

<sup>3</sup> See PRC Docket No. ACR2020, Responses of the United States Postal Service to Questions 1-38 of Chairman's Information Request No. 1, January 19, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> See PRC Docket No. ACR2020, Responses of The United States Postal Service to Questions 1-7 of Chairman's Information Request No. 2, January 21, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> See PRC Docket No. ACR2020, United States Postal Service FY2020 Annual Compliance Report, December 29, 2020; PRC Docket No. ACR2020, Responses of the United States Postal Service to Questions 1-26 Of Chairman's Information Request No. 3., January 22, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> January 19, 2021 Motion, at 14-15.

The Postal Service questions the utility of Mr. Hutkins' other information requests, which threaten to exact steep costs. As Mr. Hutkins concedes, the Postal Service has not, in recent years, made a practice of furnishing detailed information from the Collection Point Management System (CPMS); nor did the Commission, in its FY 2020 Information Requests, require density test data from the Collection Point Management System.<sup>7</sup> These circumstances strongly suggest that the value of such data to the Commission for purposes of evaluating compliance is nothing like what Mr. Hutkins' motion claims. Such responses impose a costly burden on Postal Service staff. The requested CPMS data must be extracted and organized in large files that require extraordinary measures simply to transfer internally. The utility of data at this level of granularity to the task faced by the Commission in the ACR process is far from evident.

The same principle applies to Mr. Hutkins' information requests concerning collection boxes: the scant benefits that they would convey fail to justify the costs that they would impose. Moreover, the rationales adduced for his request do not reflect a complete grasp of the underlying facts. For example, Mr. Hutkins alleges the following:

Last summer, the widespread and unexpected removal of collection boxes became an issue of national concern. Appearing before Congress, the Postmaster General downplayed the removals and suggested it was all business as usual. . . The Postmaster General did not share, however, that the Postal Service had initiated a Work Hour Reduction plan that included removing thousands of collection boxes. On June 26, 2020, a presentation was given at postal headquarters about this plan, which was designed to cut 64 million hours. The plan included a "Collection Box Optimization" strategy to eliminate 29,618 boxes in FY 2021. It is possible that the removals that took place during the summer of 2020 were intended to get a jump on this ambitious goal of removing 30,000 boxes.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> January 19, 2021 Motion, at 4.

<sup>8</sup> January 19, 2021 Motion, at 5-6.

The “Work Hour Reduction Plan” to which Mr. Hutkins refers is in fact a yearly budgeting tool designed to match workhours to workload in accordance with currently projected volumes of mail for the coming financial year. Furthermore, collection box removal is a function of the annual assessments, carried out by the Postal Service for many years now, of collection box density, i.e., volume of mail per box; local postal officials conduct these assessments, typically without involvement from Headquarters.<sup>9</sup> To force the Postal Service to expound in greater detail on this and similar matters would prove unproductive, as the premise for the question misconstrues the underlying facts. Thus, while the effort to dispel Mr. Hutkins’ narrative would certainly place a strain on the Postal Service’s resources, it would confer on the Commission no corresponding gain in insight.

In short, the Postal Service remains unconvinced that any of the data requested by Mr. Hutkins are actually necessary to the Commission’s task of “conducting core regulatory analysis,” or that they would “improve staff efficiency in conducting the analysis,” as Hutkins alleges.<sup>10</sup> Mr. Hutkins’ motion seeks more extensive information than he has sought in previous dockets, and the Postal Service particularly opposes any information beyond what has been provided in the past, as the effort required to obtain this additional information would present an unreasonable burden to Postal Service staff and would add little to no value to the Commission’s analysis.

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<sup>9</sup> See Declaration of Jennifer Vo, No. 20 Civ. 6516 (VM), *Jones v. United States Postal Serv.* F Supp 3d. 2020 NY Dist., WL5525748. It also bears mentioning, in light of the allegations couched in Mr. Hutkins’ narrative, that Postmaster General Louis DeJoy was not involved in any decisions relating to removal of collection boxes prior to August 18, 2020, when he issued a directive that the Postal Service postpone removing collection boxes for a period of 90 days. *Id.* at 7.

<sup>10</sup>*Id.* at 1.

Accordingly, the Postal Service opposes Mr. Hutkins' January 19, 2021 Motion for Issuance of Information Request.

Respectfully submitted,

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

By its attorneys:

Anthony F. Alverno  
Chief Counsel  
Global Business & Service Development

Andrew L. Pigott  
Attorney

475 L'Enfant Plaza, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20260-1101  
(202) 341-6419  
Andrew.L.Pigott@usps.gov  
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